# Black Metropolis National Heritage Area Feasibility Study

**Chapter 1: Introduction** 



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## Purpose of the feasibility study

This Feasibility Study has been undertaken by the <u>Black Metropolis National Heritage Area Commission</u> (Commission), the Bronzeville Community Development Partnership (the Partnership), along with numerous community partners. Technical assistance was provided by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) <u>Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program</u>, the <u>City of Chicago Department of Housing and Economic Development</u> (DHED), and its <u>Historic Preservation Division</u> (HPres). This Feasibility Study seeks to explore a number of important factors which will inform the National Park Service (NPS) as it considers designation of the study area as a National Heritage Area (NHA). Moreover, this study seeks to determine whether NHA designation is the best way to achieve coordinated conservation, preservation, education, and economic goals of the community, with the hope that these efforts will prove that the Black Metropolis is qualified for designation as a NHA by the United States Congress.

The Feasiblity Study is organized into eight chapters:

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the Feasibility Study and the process by which this study has been developed.

#### **Chapter 2: Study Area History and Contributions**

This chapter describes the history of the people and landscape of the Black Metropolis from the 1800s to present day. It discusses the people, places, and ideas that have influenced Chicago and America's history.

#### Chapter 3: Themes

Building off the study area history and contributions, Chapter 3 lays out the interpretive themes that this heritage area should focus on in its first few years of development.

#### **Chapter 4: Affected Environment**

This chapter describes resources in the study area and the potential impacts of the proposed interpretive themes. Future projects undertaken within the heritage area will require further evaluation when the design and project implementation details are more fully defined.

#### **Chapter 5: Management Alternatives**

This chapter describes three alternative management approaches for the implementation of the heritage area goals. It covers the proposed organizational structure of the coordinating entity, implementation strategies and actions, potential partners, possible funding opportunties, and early implementation activities.



#### Chapter 6: Application of Interim NHA Criteria

This chapter discssues each criterion and evaluates the potential for heritage area designation.

#### **Chapter 7: Vision Statement**

Based on public input and engagement, the vision statement of the proposed heritage area is described in detail in this chapter.

#### **Chapter 8: Impact Assessment**

This chapter describes the anticipated impacts related to the various management alternatives . It also addresses the potential impacts of identified management alternatives described in Chapter 4.

## What are National Heritage Areas?

National Heritage Areas are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. Heritage areas tell nationally important stories that celebrate our nation's diverse heritage. NHAs are lived-in landscapes. Consequently, NHA entities collaborate with communities to determine how to make heritage relevant to local interests and needs.

NHAs are a grassroots, community-driven approach to heritage conservation and economic development. Through public-private partnerships, NHA entities support historic preservation, natural resource conservation, recreation, heritage tourism, and educational projects. Leveraging funds and long-term support for projects, NHA partnerships foster pride of place and an enduring stewardship ethic.

NHAs are not national park units. Rather, NPS partners with, provides technical assistance, and distributes matching federal funds from Congress to NHA entities. NPS does not assume ownership of land inside heritage areas or impose land use controls.<sup>1</sup>

For more information on national heritage areas, visit <a href="http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/">http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/</a>.

## Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to provide the NPS with information regarding the appropriateness of designating Chicago's Black Metropolis area as a NHA. Located within the greater Bronzeville community, the Black Metropolis NHA would establish a framework within which residents, community organizations, local institutions, businesses, and elected officials will work together to interpret the area's distinctive landscape, history and culture of the Black

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> From <a href="http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/FAQ/">http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/FAQ/</a>.



Metropolis, and the story of the Great Migration. The ultimate goal of the NHA will be to focus on tourism and economic development, building upon the community's existing education and cultural tourism resources.

After designation, the first step in the process will be to establish a coordinating entity, which will connect various organizations seeking to share, educate, and interpret the history of Bronzeville; organizations that seek to improve quality of life in the community; and organizations looking to promote the area to visitors and prospective investors to ensure that future development in Bronzeville is informed by its rich history and cultural legacy. The coordinating entity will assist in preserving and protecting the historic sites, neighborhoods, and cultural artifacts of Chicago's Black Metropolis and Great Migration period. It will also promote the area's history and reinforce the accomplishments of Chicago's African-Americans to current and future generations.

## Study process

The process to develop this study was informed by nearly two decades of coalition-building led by community-based organizations, specifically the Bronzeville Community Development Partnership (the Partnership) and the Bronzeville Visitor Information Center (BVIC). These two organizations are not-for-profit organizations located in the heart of the present-day Black Metropolis. They have collaborated for many years to pursue a number of goals, one of which is authenticating the importance of the Black Metropolis to our nation's history by seeking NHA designation.

The Partnership is a collaboration of nine community-based organizations, local institutions, and neighborhood businesses that serve as partners and advisors who represent a broad spectrum of social, cultural, and tourism interests throughout the community. The Partnership's purpose is to advance Bronzeville's profile as a destination for cultural and heritage tourism, and to ensure that tourism and any associated development contributes to local sustainability.

The Partnership has led heritage-area designation efforts by engaging in a multiyear planning process which has involved extensive public input around the proposed NHA. The following is a timeline of activities that ultimately led to this study.

#### 2004: Commission formed

In 2004, the Partnership formed a steering committee to work on the Black Metropolis NHA project. The steering committee was later named the Black Metropolis National Heritage Area Commission (the Commission). The Commission is co-chaired by six community leaders each of whom leads a subcommittee – capacity building, planning and preservation, education and research, tourism and economic development, hospitality, and workforce development and training. A complete list of the steering committee membership can be found in Appendix 7.



#### 2005: Educating and learning

The Commission hosted heritage area development summits in 2005, 2007, 2008, and 2010, bringing together local leaders to discuss the campaign to preserve the Black Metropolis as a NHA. At each summit, the Commission introduced participants to the project, shared plans for the heritage area, sought feedback, and identified priorities.

#### 2007: Alliance of National Heritage Areas International conference

In 2007, the Commission sent a twelve-member delegation to the Alliance of National Heritage Areas International Conference in Detroit, Michigan. The purpose of this trip was for delegates to learn more about the process by which heritage areas receive designation. The Commission engaged government leaders on what was needed to develop locally-supported goals and create strong collaborations among key stakeholders.

#### 2008: Congressional resolution

One of the outcomes of the working summits was drafting the language of a congressional resolution of support (see Appendix 5 and 6). On February 27, 2008, Congressman Bobby Rush introduced House Resolution (H.R.) 5505, the Black Metropolis National Heritage Area Study Bill. The resolution's purpose was to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of designating the Black Metropolis as a NHA. H.R. 5505 was a product of the five-year collaboration between Congressman Rush and the Commission. Ultimately, the bill did not receive enough national support, and it was not approved by the U.S. House of Representatives.

Recognizing that the hundredth anniversary of the Great Migration was approaching, the Commission agreed to focus its efforts on planning a Centennial celebration. In 2008, the Commission hosted a legislative reception at the Illinois Governor's Conference on Tourism in Springfield, Illinois. At this reception, the Commission presented the Black Metropolis National Heritage Area project to the governor and requested the state designate a commission to assist in the planning of a Great Migration Centennial celebration in 2016. At this time, the Governor took no action on the centennial resolution.

#### 2009: Congressional resolution

On November 3, 2009, Congressmen Rush, Hare, Manzullo, Shimkus, and Jackson, brought H.R. 4004 to the floor, again requesting that the Secretary of the Interior conduct a study to determine the feasibility of designating the study area as the Black Metropolis National Heritage Area in the State of Illinois. At this time, there was not enough support to pass H.R. 4004, and the bill was ultimately referred to the Committee on Natural Resources.

#### 2010: Great Migration Centennial Commission

With the resolution stalled at the federal level, the Commission worked to continue the conversation around the state for support for the centennial celebration of the Great Migration. A resolution was put forth to the Illinois General Assembly, sponsored by Illinois State Senator Mattie Hunter and State Representative Ken Dunkin. The resolution recognized the 100-year anniversary of the largest migration to ever occur in North America. Co-chaired by Governor Pat Quinn and former Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, the centennial commission includes 25



appointed members as the executive board and a nominated honorary board. The Black Metropolis National Heritage Area Commission is recognized as the Council of Advisors in planning the commemorative celebration. The Great Migration Centennial Commission (SJR0067) was approved by both houses of the Illinois General Assembly on March 17, 2010 (see Appendix 6).

The Great Migration Centennial 1916-2016 celebration will pay homage to the Great Migration through a series of exhibit programs that build off heritage area themes, including an unprecedented series of "homecoming" tribute concerts by native Chicagoans. The Mayor's Office of Special Events plans to highlight the Centennial during the 2016 Blues Music Festival, Jazz Music Festival, Gospel Music Festival, and other annual cultural activities. University partners are also engaged in the Centennial conversation and plan to host educational symposiums, tours, conferences, and related courses in 2016.

Finally, in addition to live events, the community is developing a digital, neighborhood information network called Bronzeville Commons. The network will be an online resource for all things Bronzeville – past, present, and future.

#### 2011: Feasibility study

The first step in NHA designation is to conduct a feasibility study. This study can be undertaken at the prompting of Congress via a resolution requesting the Secretary of the Interior develop a feasibility study. This approach had been unsuccessful in the past due to lack of broad-based support from Congress. The second way a feasibility study can be developed is through local capacity. In 2011, the Commission submitted a request to CMAP's LTA program to assist in the development of a feasibility study. This proposal was accepted and directly resulted in CMAP's assistance in developing this study.

The first step in developing the feasibility study was to understand the work that the Commission and Partnership had accomplished to-date. It was also determined that the study would require a significant commitment from project partners, therefore an advisory committee comprised of Commission members, was created to guide the development of this study.

#### **Project Advisory Committee**

The Project Advisory Committee (PAC), supported by DHED and CMAP, held monthly meetings to discuss and provide input to relevant tasks necessary for this document. Advisory committee members were also tasked with identifying, inviting, and engaging stakeholders to participate in various events during the study process. Together they have participated in numerous public events disseminating information about the proposed NHA; the advisory committee's participation in this process has been vital to engaging the greater Bronzeville community in the development of the feasibility study. PAC members include:

- Kimberly Brown, neighborhood resident
- Delmarie Cobb, Black Metropolis National Heritage Area Commission
- Leroy Kennedy, Illinois Institute of Technology



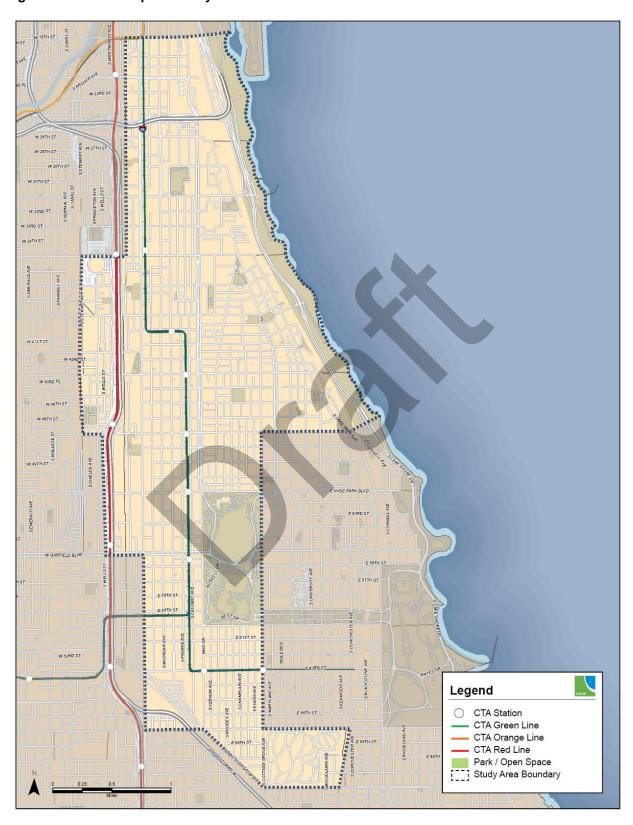
- Yvette Le Grand, neighborhood resident
- Dr. Christopher Reed, Roosevelt University
- Paula Robinson, Bronzeville Community Development Partnership
- Christopher Vaughn, WTTW Chicago Public Television Community Liaison
- Beth Johnson, Historic Preservation Division
- James Wilson, Department of Housing and Economic Development

## Study area

The Black Metropolis study area is located in the greater Bronzeville community of the City of Chicago, approximately five miles south of downtown. The general boundaries are; 18th Street to the North, 71st Street to the South, Lake Michigan to the East, and Canal Street to the West. (See Figure 1. Black Metropolis Study Area). This area represents an assemblage of natural, historic, educational, and recreational resources. It is a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape that is worthy of preservation through the heritage area designation. The area includes a number of Chicago community areas, including the following: Armour Square, Douglas, Fuller Park, Grand Boulevard, Greater Grand Crossing, Kenwood, Near South Side, Oakland, Washington Park, and Woodlawn.



Figure 1. Black Metropolis Study Area



## Coordination with concurrent studies and past plans

The review of nearly 30-years of plans and studies for greater Bronzeville reveals that extensive planning and implementation activities have set the stage for the proposed heritage area. This section describes the key findings of these documents in an effort to understand the local and regional framework, within which the proposed NHA – and consequently the coordinating entity – will have to work. This section also identifies areas where the proposed coordinating entity could help to implement existing plans though economic development activities and cultural heritage tourism.

The plans and studies that were reviewed include:

- 1. Black Metropolis Landmark Report (1984)
- 2. Mid-South Strategic Development Plan (1993)
- 3. Chicago Housing Authority's Plan for Transformation (2000)
- 4. Quad Communities Quality of Life Plan: Connecting Past, Present and Future (2005)
- 5. Cottage Grove Corridor Master Plan (2006)
- 6. Cottage Grove Beautification Plan (2006)
- 7. Cottage Grove Design and Streetscape Guidelines (2007)
- 8. Re-Connecting Neighborhoods Plan (2009)
- 9. Developing Vibrant Retail in Bronzeville (2012)
- 10. South Lakefront Corridor Transit Study (2013)

#### Black Metropolis Landmark Report (1984)

The Black Metropolis Landmark Report was instrumental in supporting the successful application to the National Register of Historic Places for nine local structures. The report highlighted the importance of preserving Chicago's African-American history through the creation of a historic district for the area associated with the Black Metropolis. Highlighting the rise and decline of the Black Metropolis, the Chicago Landmark Report identifies local structures worthy of preservation, which were crucial to the neighborhood's history of music, print media, manufacturing, religious institutions, and commerce. On April 30, 1986 each of the following structures received national landmark status:

- 1. Overton Hygienic/Douglass National Bank Building, 3619-27 South State Street
- 2. Chicago Bee Building, 3647-55 South State Street
- 3. Wabash Avenue YMCA, 3763 South Wabash Avenue
- 4. Chicago Defender Building, 3435 South Indiana Avenue
- 5. Unity Hall, 3140 South Indiana Avenue
- 6. Eighth Regiment Armory, 3533 South Giles Avenue
- 7. Sunset Café/Grand Terrace Café, 315 East 35th Street
- 8. Victory Monument, 35th Street and South Martin Luther Jr. Drive
- 9. Liberty Life/Supreme Life Insurance Company, 3501 South Martin Luther King Jr. Drive



This report was submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks for consideration. The Commission was supportive of designation. When the City's Department of Planning was presented with the report, it was decided to incorporate the plan for designation into the strategic plan for revitalization of the area. Meanwhile, Commission staff moved forward with the report for National Register designation so that property owners would be able to take advantage of tax incentives for architectural restoration projects. The report was revised in 1994, and on August 28, 1997, it was submitted to Chicago's City Council for their consideration of landmark designation. The Chicago City Council approved the recommendation for Chicago Landmark status of each individual building in 1998. These individual landmark buildings make up the Black Metropolis-Bronzeville Historic District.

Two additional structures were mentioned in the report, but ultimately not included in the proposed district. They are the site of the Jordan Building, 3529-49 South State Street and the site of the National Pythian Temple, located at 3735-45 South State Street. Due to a lack of official designation, and new development in the area, neither building remains today.

#### Mid-South Strategic Development Plan (1993)

The City of Chicago developed the Mid-South plan in 1993, setting short and long-term goals for reinvestment in greater Bronzeville. The plan recommends new development focus on existing assets like McCormick Place Convention Center, and also promotes the need for increased connectivity from Cottage Grove Avenue to the Hyde Park neighborhood and the Museum of Science and Industry. The plan also notes the opportunity greater Bronzeville has for enhanced tourism by capitalizing on the community's historic boulevards and Blues history.

The Mid-South Planning and Development Commission worked diligently in the 1990s to implement this plan, restoring a number of historic buildings throughout Bronzeville. These buildings include residences located within the designated landmark Black Metropolis-Bronzeville Historic District. A Blues District was also established to help restore 47th Street, and 3rd Ward Alderman Dorothy Tillman and Lou Rawls, famed vocalist and former Ida B. Wells resident, spearheaded the development of the Harold Washington Cultural Center to encourage nightlife. Today, the district is lined with streetscape that includes banners and art that involve images from the heydays of the Black Metropolis.

#### Chicago Housing Authority's Plan for Transformation (2000)

Until 2002, Bronzeville was home to the highest concentration of public housing in country. This included four high-rise public housing developments: Ida B. Wells, Madden Park, Robert Taylor Homes, and Stateway Gardens. These housing developments, administered by the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), were constructed between 1939 and 1970. Originally intended to serve as homes for war-industry workers and transitional housing for veterans and low-income residents, over time, as the jobs the migrants came to fill left the city, these developments became sites of concentrated poverty, violence, crime, and drugs. To combat these issues, the CHA developed the Plan for Transformation, a plan that aimed to "build and



strengthen communities by integrating public housing and its leaseholders into the larger social, economic, and physical fabric of Chicago."<sup>2</sup>

The Plan for Transformation called for a new approach to public housing under the federal HOPE IV program. Public housing in Chicago was replaced with new mixed-income communities; which were to include a mix of CHA managed public housing units, and non-CHA affordable, and market-rate units. Public housing demolition began in 2002, removing over 10,000 public housing units in Bronzeville alone. As of 2012, 755 new CHA public housing units were built, along with nearly equal numbers of affordable and market-rate units, leaving Bronzeville with a less than a third of its original number of public housing units.

## Quad Communities Quality of Life Plan: Connecting Past, Present and Future (2005)

The Quad Communities (Douglas, Grand Boulevard, Oakland, and North Kenwood), part of the greater Bronzeville, participated in the development of a Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Quality of Life Plan in 2005 to improve the quality of life for existing residents, while balancing opportunities to welcome new residents. The plan's many recommendations include: improved public safety, neighborhood beautification, and community infrastructure, as well as integrating arts, culture, and history into the community. The plan also saw a need to better coordinate local activities, calling for the creation of a neighborhood historical society and arts council to connect the plethora of existing groups engaged in local arts, culture, heritage tourism, and recreation – similar to the charge of the proposed coordinating entity.

#### Cottage Grove Corridor Master Plan (2006)

The Cottage Corridor Grove master plan was prepared in March 2006 by Chicago-based architecture firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. It was primarily an urban design study focused on a one-and-a-half mile stretch of Cottage Grove Avenue, from Pershing Road to 51st Street on Chicago's South Side. The master plan was meant to serve as a guide for future development and to promote Cottage Grove Avenue as a premier retail destination focused on small and medium-sized businesses, especially around the existing assets along 47th Street. The plan called for an enhanced physical identity of the street and to encourage a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

#### Cottage Grove Beautification Plan (2006)

The Cottage Grove Beautification Plan was the product of a community led initiative to use place-making as a tool for economic growth. The plan hoped to create a distinctive identity for Cottage Grove Avenue, a major arterial in Bronzeville that is lined with both commercial and residential land uses. The goals of the plan were to establish an identity and character for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See <a href="http://www.thecha.org/pages/the-plan-for-transformation/22.php">http://www.thecha.org/pages/the-plan-for-transformation/22.php</a>.



Cottage Grove; raise awareness and preserve Bronzeville's cultural assets; create a unique destination commercial corridor; and to use art to foster a sense of community between residents, business owners, and visitors. The result of this plan has led to a number of corridor beautification projects including light pole banners and murals.

#### Cottage Grove Design and Streetscape Guidelines (2007)

The Cottage Grove Design and Streetscape Guidelines were prepared in 2007 by Bauer Latoza Studio for the City of Chicago. The purpose of the guidelines was to create a framework for future development along Cottage Grove Avenue with the intention of rebuilding it into a vibrant corridor. The guidelines call for new development to reflect an understanding of the immediate site surroundings and the corridor's historic character. They also called for incorporating community identifiers into the overall design of the streetscape improvements to further enhance the appearance corridor.

#### Re-Connecting Neighborhoods Plan (2009)

This planning effort, led by the Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC), was funded through the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) as a response to the CHA's Plan for Transformation. Re-Connecting Neighborhoods' objective was to better connect communities affected by the Plan for Transformation by increasing access to public transportation and commercial services, along with improving the pedestrian environment. The plan calls for amending local zoning to encourage development and redevelopment of the Mid-South area (roughly Bronzeville), and was adopted by the Chicago Planning Commission in 2009.

Of particular relevance to proposed heritage area, Re-Connecting Neighborhoods recommends designing a gateway feature at Lake Shore Drive as a point of entry into Bronzeville. It also recommends better signage along the lakefront directing visitors into Bronzeville, improved lakefront access, and increased arts and recreation along key corridors. To-date, the point of entry sign has been established, clearly letting passers-by know they are in historic Bronzeville.

#### Developing Vibrant Retail in Bronzeville: MPC Task Force Report (2012)

This report was developed by MPC and CMAP at the request the Bronzeville Alliance, the report explores strategies for promoting retail development in Bronzeville. It advocates for historic preservation related to the community's history as a music mecca to increase tourism. To foster local retail, the plan supports the work of community organizations like Black Metropolis Convention and Tourism Council, the Bronzeville Tourism Visitor Information Center (BVIC), and the Partnership. The plan also encourages local businesses to promote cultural tourism as part of the larger retail development strategy.

#### South Lakefront Corridor Transit Study (2013)

The South Lakefront Corridor Transit Study was a community-initiated project funded by the City of Chicago to improve public transportation in the Chicago's South Side communities. The



plan's goal is to identify improvements to public transportation, to enhance mobility for residents of the South Side, and to increase access to jobs. In addition to identifying gaps in the existing transportation network, the study identified two underserved areas as priority areas for improvement. One of the identified priority corridors is located in the heart of Bronzeville from Cottage Grove between 35th and 55th Streets. While funding for these transit improvements is not available today, the report suggests that the Cottage Grove corridor should be further evaluated for bus rapid transit or streetcar potential.

#### Chicago Neighborhoods Now (2013)

Launched in March of 2013, the Chicago Neighborhoods Now is an initiative of the City of Chicago to improve seven neighborhoods, and includes: Englewood, Pullman, Rogers Park, Uptown, Little Village, Bronzeville, and the Eisenhower Corridor. This initiative seeks to coordinate public and private investment in an effort to spur local growth through economic development and quality-of-life improvements in the identified communities.

In Bronzeville, the Neighborhoods Now program kicked off with the development of a three-acre mixed-use project called the "Shops and Lofts" at 47th Street. This project includes a five-story, 72-unit residential building with 55,000 square feet of retail space to be occupied by a Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market. The Shops and Lofts project is part of nearly \$1 billion in goals for Bronzeville to include the entertainment-oriented revitalization of the Motor Row Historic District along South Michigan Avenue; and continued support for mixed-use redevelopment projects on 47th Street, such as the pending rehabilitation of Rosenwald Apartments and Bronzeville Artists' Lofts.<sup>3</sup>

### Illinois heritage areas

In addition to looking at local planning efforts, it is important to understand the larger connections the proposed Black Metropolis heritage area has with existing heritage areas in Illinois. Presently, Illinois is home to two officially designated heritage areas, the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area (ALNHA) and the Illinois & Michigan (I&M) Canal National Heritage Corridor. A third area, the Calumet National Heritage Area, described below, is in the process of becoming designated as a heritage area by NPS. Additionally, the Pullman community is seeking to become a national historical park, a designation that applies to collections of historic sites or buildings. If successful, Pullman would be the first national park in Chicago, and the second in Illinois.

The existing and proposed heritage areas, corridors, and national parks in Illinois each contribute to the story of the Great Migration. Lincoln played a critical role in ending slavery, while the I&M Canal helped make Chicago the powerhouse of industry in the 1900s. Both of

http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/mayor/press\_room/press\_releases/2013/april\_2013/mayor\_emanuel\_celeb\_ratesgroundbreakingof47thstreetshopsandloftsi.html.



<sup>3</sup>**S**ee

these help illustrate the journey and decisions made by African-Americans as they moved to the North. The proposed Calumet heritage area and proposed Pullman national park build on these stories as well. Calumet was home to numerous steel companies which supplied jobs for migrants. Pullman porters assisted in the Great Migration by disseminating African-American news media that promoted jobs and opportunity in the North. A brief description of each area, along with the location's significance to the Great Migration and Black Metropolis-Bronzeville community is included in this study.

#### Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area (ALNHA)

The only NHA named for a President, ALNHA is home to a unique collection of historical sites and stories. In this forty-two county NHA located in central Illinois, visitors can find the courthouses where Abraham Lincoln argued cases, log cabins, hotels, and homes where he entertained friends for more than 30 years. The cultural landscape provides insight into Lincoln's character and personal development, as he prepared to take office in the years leading up to the Civil War.

Lincoln's connections to Chicago are many, as the City was host to the Republican convention that nominated the President, as well as the site of Camp Douglas, a Civil War prisoner-of-war camp created by Presidential decree, located in the Black Metropolis. The President's connection to Chicago's African-American population and to the Great Migration story is also significant. The fact that the Lincoln hailed from Illinois served as a boon to local abolitionist efforts, culminating in 1862 with several Chicago churches, Bronzeville's Quinn Chapel among them, voting to send a delegation to plead with President Lincoln for emancipation. After Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the Great Migration can be viewed as the next step forward in what would be more than a century of Civil Rights progress.

#### Calumet National Heritage Area

In 1996, Representative Jerry Weller (R-IL) introduced the "Calumet Ecological Park Act of 1996" in the U.S. Congress. The Act passed and required the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the feasibility of establishing a Calumet Ecological Park in the vicinity of Chicago, Illinois. NPS conducted this study and published its draft study in early 1997. NPS concluded that the area was suitable for consideration as a NHA, rather than an ecological park, allowing the area to be recognized for its significant historic, cultural, and economic features as well as its ecology. Besides the NHA option, the NPS study, completed in February 1998, proposed an alternative plan, calling for local control and management of the area's diverse assets, which would involve federal assistance or involvement on an as-needed basis only.

The proposed Calumet heritage area would work to protect the region between the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore and the I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor. The federal designation would assist the local community in preserving its native prairies, marshes and diverse wildlife along the Grand Calumet River, Little Calumet River, Cal-Sag Channel, and Lake Calumet.



The proposed heritage area would also allow the region to preserve, restore and celebrate its historical, cultural and economic features, including a unique industrial and labor history. The steelmaking industry thrived in southeast Chicago, and which continues to play a major role in Northwest Indiana's economy. With this industrial activity came significant developments in the labor movement, and cultural influences of the populations who came to work in the steel mills.<sup>4</sup>

After Representative Weller proposed the ecological park, and the subsequent recommendation of an NHA designation among other options, the project has been delayed. The Representative did not put legislation forward for NHA approval. The reasons for this are several, but a major obstacle has been opposition to the project from citizens groups in Indiana, who may fear a loss of property rights. A group was formed to coordinate between the various stakeholders in Indiana and Illinois, the Calumet Heritage Partnership. The group continues to explore preservation in the Calumet region, gathering as recently as November 2012 to discuss preservation through an NHA designation or through other means.<sup>5</sup>

#### Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor

The I&M Canal is a 96-mile long man-made and hand-dug waterway stretching from Chicago to LaSalle, Illinois, which connects Lake Michigan to the Illinois River. The opening of the I&M Canal in 1848 contributed greatly to the growth of Chicago, and more broadly northern Illinois, producing a Midwestern metropolis and key commercial crossroads. The vision of the canal's commissioners was matched by innovation from citizens and businesses along its length, who patented agriculture and industrial innovations that relied on the newfound link between the two waterways. Illinois and Chicago's current prominence in the Midwest region is directly traceable to the canal.

The Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor, designated in 1984, was the first heritage corridor in the nation. The site of the origins of the I&M Canal, in Chicago's Bridgeport neighborhood, is a Chicago landmark. The Corridor covers 862 square miles, in a linear alignment along the canal's length, encompassing parts of 57 communities. The purpose of the I&M Canal Corridor is to retain, enhance, and interpret, for the benefit and inspiration of present and future generations, the cultural, historical, natural, recreational, and economic resources of the heritage corridor.

#### Pullman National Historic Park (proposed)

Built by railroad titan George Pullman, the Pullman neighborhood was among America's first "company towns." Pullman hired former slaves as porters on his trains to entice middle-class Americans with an upper-class experience on Pullman sleeper cars – by attending to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> From <a href="http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1999-10-24/news/9910240270">http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1999-10-24/news/9910240270</a> 1 national-heritage-area-environmental-groups-calumet-region.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> From Sierra Club Illinois.

passengers' every need with a smile. The Pullman porters played a major role in the dissemination of information about the opportunities in the north to African-Americans in the south. Pullman's massive railcar production lines produced the country's first African-American labor union – the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The factory also served as the focal point for a violent, two-month labor strike in 1894 that ultimately pushed public sentiment toward unions and government regulation of industry.

The Historic Pullman Foundation, chartered in 1973, is focused on promoting preservation and lobbying for NHA designation efforts for the Pullman neighborhood of Chicago. Residents are hoping for a national park in order to ensure better protection of the area's historic sites, as well as to promote economic development and tourism. The Pullman area is on the National Register, a Chicago landmark historic district, and includes rows of attached worker housing, remaining factory and administration buildings, hotel, and stables, has been a National Historic Landmark since 1970. The State of Illinois has owned the hotel, and the factory and administration building, since 1991. State efforts have fallen short in regards to preservation and renovation of Pullman's sites, however. Legislation was introduced in 2012 asking for the NPS to conduct a feasibility study to assess the site's suitability for a national park designation. If approved, the site would be the first national park in Chicago and the second in Illinois, joining the Lincoln Home and surrounding neighborhood in Springfield.

## African-American history and experience as told through NHAs

Equally important to the story of Chicago's Black Metropolis are the stories of the communities from which migrants came. The majority of Chicago's migrants came from southern states such as Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi; with them came family traditions and culture, which heavily influenced the formation of the Black Metropolis. Today, there are a number of nationally designated heritage areas, and communities seeking NHA designation, whose stories collectively tell the important history of African-Americans in our country.

Some African-American communities in southern states were decimated as Blacks migrated north. The interpretation of these stories has been preserved through the NHA designation. Four established NHAs, and one heritage area presently seeking designation, are most closely related to the story of the Black Metropolis. They include the following:

- 1. Alabama Black Belt heritage area<sup>6</sup>
- 2. Gullah Geechee National Heritage Corridor
- 3. Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area
- 4. Mississippi Hills National Heritage Area
- 5. Detroit's MotorCities National Heritage Area

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> The Alabama Black Belt heritage area is presently seeking official NHA designation.



#### Alabama Black Belt heritage area

The Alabama Black Belt heritage area organization is presently seeking Congressional designation as a NHA. Stretching across the lower-central portion of Alabama, from the Mississippi to the Georgia border, the 19 counties of the proposed heritage area sustain an abundance of natural resources, historical roots, cultural diversity, and recreational activities. Part of a larger southern Black Belt, stretching from Texas to Virginia, the term Black Belt originally described the areas' dark, rich soil – making it an ideal home for cotton plantations. Eventually "Black Belt" would describe not only the characteristics of the land, but would be indicative of the African-Americans who lived and worked there. The Black Belt is the beginning of the Great Migration story for hundreds of thousands of African-Americans who migrated from this area to points north, including Chicago. Moreover, Alabama's rich, agricultural region formed the cultural traits, ranging from culinary practices to linguistic styles that migrants brought with them on their journeys.

#### Gullah Geechee National Heritage Corridor

The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor was designated a NHA by an act of Congress on October 12, 2006. The corridor encompasses a unique cultural and linguistic area along the southeastern coast of the United States, from the northern border of Pender County, North Carolina to the southern border of St. Johns County, Florida, stretching 30 miles inland. The land mass of this area includes the coastal plain and 79 barrier islands that hug the coast, and encompass approximately 12,818 square miles, an area larger than the states of Maryland and Delaware combined.

The Gullah Geechee people have been able to preserve much of their African cultural heritage because of geography, climate, and the circumstances of the slave trade. By the middle of the 18th century, the South Carolina and Georgia low-country was covered by thousands of acres of rice fields. Captive African farmers from the "Rice Coast" brought the skills for cultivation and tidal irrigation that made rice one of the most successful industries in early America. Because of previous exposure to diseases such as malaria and yellow fever, African captives also brought some immunity to lowland diseases, allowing their population to grow at higher rates than Whites who were more susceptible. Fear of disease eventually drove many White planters to leave the area altogether, entrusting their plantations to African overseers. The physical isolation of the Gullah Geechee region, composed primarily of barrier islands and lowland swamps, further contributed to the independent formation of Gullah culture. The resulting tradition was quite different from that of slaves in states like Virginia and North Carolina, who generally lived in smaller settlements and had more sustained and frequent interactions with Whites.

Despite its isolation, the Gullah Geechee region played an important role in the Great Migration story, with much of its population moving north in search of work and opportunity. Gullah Geechee migrants included some who would make their name in Chicago, notably Robert S.



Abbott, the founder of the Chicago *Defender*. Abbott was born in St. Simons Island, Georgia to former slave parents. He would move to Chicago in the late 1890s, founding the *Defender* in 1905. Other examples include First Lady Michelle Obama, whose great-great-grandfather, Jim Robinson, was enslaved on Friendfield Plantation in Georgetown, South Carolina. Relatives of Mrs. Obama still live in the Georgetown area. Gullah ancestry was depicted in the Michelle Obama Story Quilt, created by a low-country craftswoman and displayed at the Smithsonian during the 2009 Presidential inauguration.

#### Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area

Established and signed in to law by President Obama in 2009, the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area describes the Delta as "the land where the Blues began, where Rock and Roll was created and where Gospel remains a vibrant art. It is an agricultural region where cotton was once king, and where "precision-ag" rules today. It is a place that saw the struggles of the Civil War and the cultural revolution of the Civil Rights Movement. It is the home of the Great Migration, and a land of rich culinary, religious, artistic and literary heritage." Not only does the Mississippi Delta have a cultural connection to Chicago, it also has a physical connection to Chicago's African-American community. The Illinois Central railroad, with direct service from Chicago, through Mississippi, to New Orleans brought thousands of migrants north during the Great Migration. Gospel, jazz, Delta blues, and soul food were the cultural transplants that accompanied migrants to their new homes, and have become hallmarks of national African-American culture.

#### Mississippi Hills National Heritage Area

Despite the rich agricultural land and dense forest of the Mississippi Hills region, a 100-mile wide area in Northern Mississippi, the Mississippi Hills National Heritage Area primarily promotes the region's artistic and civic bounty. Also designated in 2009, the Mississippi Hills NHA shares a special connection to the Black Metropolis and the Great Migration story in that it was also the home to many renowned civil rights figures. Ida B. Wells, who battled lynching in the deep-South before moving to Chicago, hails from this area. Among the many great musicians that made their home in Chicago, those hailing from Mississippi include Chess Records great Howlin' Wolf, blues legends Muddy Watters and Koko Taylor, jazz legends galore, and more recently television celebrity Oprah Winfrey.

#### MotorCities National Heritage Area

The MotorCities National Heritage Area was designated by Congress in 1998 to preserve, interpret, and promote Michigan's rich automotive and labor heritage. Upon the interpretive foundation provided by the automotive industry, MotorCities explores important stories relating to automobile manufacturing, American labor, the strengthening of the middle class, and the Civil Rights movement. Critical to the growth of the automotive industry, and to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See <a href="http://www.msdeltaheritage.com/about-the-mdnha.html">http://www.msdeltaheritage.com/about-the-mdnha.html</a>.



neighboring cities, were African-American migrants. Arriving as part of the same Great Migration that transformed Chicago, Detroit's newcomers would have many similar experiences. African-Americans employed in the automotive industry would play important roles in the national labor and civil rights movements.

## **Public involvement strategy**

The Commission developed a communications plan and public involvement strategy at the outset of this project. Four goals were developed to ensure the public's participation in the development of the feasibility study, and ultimately the heritage area plans. These goals are as follows:

- 1. To promote public understanding of the study and its process.
- 2. To maximize participation and contributions of interested and affected organizations and individuals.
- 3. To assess public support for designation.
- 4. To assess capacity and commitment of local entities and individuals to the program and to the protection of the heritage area.

Once goals were in place, the project advisory committee participated in stakeholder identification, developed a list of appropriate venues and events to reach stakeholders, engaged local residents in community conversations, engaged local media in heritage area efforts, and has been working to implement the Great Migration Centennial events. A detailed public involvement strategy can be found in Appendix 2.

## Steps to be undertaken at the conclusion of the study

This feasibility study has been developed with local capacity, and unlike when Congress authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to conduct the study, the final step in this study process is to transmit the feasibility study to the NPS. Before that occurs, however, it is recommended that the Commission reconvene its full membership to bring them up-to-date on the feasibility study process. The PAC should work together with Commission members to take the draft study back out to the community to engage them on the study's findings. The Commission should begin to campaign their existing base for letters of support for inclusion in the transmittal of the study to NPS. As a resource for this process, Appendix 4 contains draft letters of support for the proposed heritage area's designation. At the same time, the opportunity to promote and foster new partnerships should continue as the Commission and the State of Illinois plan for the Great Migration Centennial: 1916-2016.

In the near-term, the Commission should consider lobbying to have the proposed NHA boundary designated as a National Historic Landmark District,<sup>8</sup> either through NPS or in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See <a href="http://www.nps.gov/history/nhl/tutorial/About/About1.htm">http://www.nps.gov/history/nhl/tutorial/About/About1.htm</a>.



partnership with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. This designation would assist in galvanizing additional support for the Black Metropolis; and the designation would help to solidify the historic significance of the study area. It is clear that there are a significant number of historic assets located within the proposed study boundary. The preservation of the combined assets of the community is critical to the local landscape that physically illustrates the Black Metropolis and America's Great Migration.

Lastly, based upon feedback from NPS and other designated heritage areas, it is recommended that the Commission explore opportunities to partner with NHAs across the country. Specifically, the Commission should focus on engaging heritage areas that have direct ties to Chicago's Black Metropolis and the history of African-Americans in the U.S. The complete story of the Great Migration from start to present day is an integral part of our nation's heritage. While other designated heritage areas tell pieces of the story of African-Americans, this particular American story has the potential to be told over the course of the quintessential American road trip across the U.S.



